

# CEDAR CITY DAILY NEWS

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## Board explores water resources

By Cathy Wentz

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CEDAR CITY — While the Central Iron County Water Conservancy District was embroiled in a June controversy over the degree of land subsidence reported in the Cedar Valley, no one has said it does not exist.

Bill Lund, senior geologist for the Utah Geological Survey, had submitted a report on land subsidence to the water district, which was placed on its website. The study the report was based on originally measured subsidence at four feet, but that measurement was later corrected to two feet after benchmarks were found to be inaccurate. The re-

port was removed from the website after a heated June meeting in which Cedar City Surveyor Curt Neilson and Engineer Kit Wareham demanded the report be removed because the measurements reported in the study were still wrong and had not been performed by a licensed surveyor.

Although Lund is working on amending the report with the findings of a licensed surveyor, he stands firm that there is evidence of subsidence in the valley, including the fissures appearing in Enoch. They point to the Cedar Valley aquifer being overdrawn, Lund said.

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Coal Creek flows down Cedar Canyon on Friday.  
KINA WILDE / DAILY NEWS

# Board

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The problem the water district faces is how to bring more water into the aquifer. The Lake Powell pipeline looms as a very expensive source of water to provide for the needs of a population that is expected to grow. The district has also been exploring alternatives such as draining Lake Quichapa when it is full into a place where it could filter into the aquifer, or diverting "excess" water from Coal Creek to gravel pits for the same purpose.

There are many obstacles to work through in implementing those proposals that include the water rights to Coal Creek that are primarily owned by Coal Creek Irrigation Company. The gravel pit proposal has the added issue of working with the Cedar City Regional Airport to make sure birds congregating by bodies of water would not create a safety problem in airport operations.

Scott Wilson, general manager for the CICWCD, said the water levels in the aquifer are a significant community problem that will only grow worse with time.

"If we're pushing this aquifer past sustainability now, where is it going to be when we add more people, when the university grows and we get more tourism?" Wilson asked.

He also said the supply of water touches on

community sensitivities centered on economic development, university growth, tourism and the quality of life in the community.

One major problem that has not been addressed in the Cedar Valley is the overallocation of water rights, which means more water rights have been granted in the past than the actual supply of water can fulfill.

Wilson estimated that Cedar Valley water rights are over-allocated by 6,000- to 7,000-acre feet, and the overallocation began close to 1960.

The problem of water right overallocation surfaced in the Beryl/Enterprise area in 2008, and led to efforts by Jerry Olds, who was state engineer at the time, to trim back the allocation of water rights with a groundwater management plan. Though Olds has left the position, Deputy State Engineer Boyd Clayton said the engineer's office is still working to implement a groundwater management plan in the Beryl/Enterprise area.

"We're still continuing to talk to the people who live there and trying to find a solution they feel comfortable with and will help solve the problem," Clayton said.

The primary idea that has been discussed in terms of solving the overallocation problem is creating a groundwater management district. Clayton said the late Sen. Dennis Stowell, R-Dist. 28, got legislation passed

before he died that allowed formation of a district. Under that legislation a groundwater management district could be formed to collect tax revenue that would be used to buy water rights and retire them so they would not be used. That option could prevent anyone having to forfeit their water rights because the supply does not cover the rights already allocated.

The basic principle regarding the priority for water rights is based on the date the application was made for the right, which is, "first in time, first in right."

Clayton said the purpose of a groundwater management district would differ from the purpose of the CICWCD, which is to provide water to residents within its boundaries. The groundwater management district would be formed specifically to deal with groundwater management issues in a critical basin.

Clayton said once the engineer's office has brought the problem of water right allocation under control in the Beryl/Enterprise area, the Cedar Valley is in a group of other basins in the state with similar problems.

The other areas of concern are the Parowan Valley, Milford area and Puvant Valley. However, the engineer's office has not made any decisions in terms of which area would be considered next in dealing with water right problems.